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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000023

SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM PINR PREL TH PTER

SUBJECT: SOUTHERN INSURGENCY: SECRET DIALOGUE INCHES FORWARD IN FACE OF OBSTACLES

REF: A. BANGKOK 283 (ABHISIT GOVERNMENT RENEWS SECRET CHANNEL
1B. CHIANG MAI 11 (STALLED PEACE DIALOGUE AWAITS SIGNAL)
1C. 08 BANGKOK 3780 (THAILAND'S DEMOCRACY FACES CONTINUED CHALLENGES)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mike Morrow, CG, ConGen, Chiang Mai.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary and Comment

11. (S) Mark Tamthai, former RTG point-man for secret talks with southern insurgents, is nervously ambivalent about the recent renewal of the discussion channel. He told CG February 10 that the resumption lacks a formal mandate from the RTG Cabinet, and instead proceeds unofficially under encouragement from PM Abhisit and FM Kasit. The two leaders are taking a risk to proceed this way, mindful that the military leadership and influential Democrat Party elders are firmly against negotiated dialogue with the insurgents. In Tamthai's view this makes the renewal tenuous, and he cautions that the next round has yet to be scheduled.

12. (S) Comment: It is possible that Tamthai is not fully abreast of the extent to which FM Kasit is pushing the dialogue with the facilitator, the Henri Dunant Centre (see Ref A). It is also possible that HDC's assessment of the state of play is over-stated. In any case, the insurgents' initial response to renewal of the dialogue has been positive. Yet if the RTG proves unable to provide a clear mandate for the talks, the recently resumed discussion channel is unlikely to be sustained.

End Summary and Comment.

Ambivalence About Renewal of Secret Dialogue

¶ 13. (S) CG met February 10 in Chiang Mai with Mark Tamthai, Director of Payap University's Institute of Religion, Culture and Peace and former RTG point-man for secret talks with southern insurgents. Tamthai said he had participated in the renewal of the dialogue a few weeks earlier in Jakarta (as reported Ref A), but expressed a great deal of ambivalence about its direction. He asserted that the talks, once again facilitated by the Henri Dunant Centre (HDC), have resumed without any official mandate from the RTG and Cabinet, but rather solely under encouragement from Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya. Unlike the previous manifestation of the dialogue launched under former interim, military-appointed PM Surayud Chulanont, this time the RTG security, military, and intelligence elements are not involved. They are in fact being kept in the dark about the renewal, Tamthai said.

¶ 14. (S) As when we met in mid-January (Ref B), Tamthai cautioned that the military leadership as well as influential Democrat Party elders were firmly against negotiated dialogue with the insurgents. Thus there has been no Cabinet decision to resume the dialogue, he said. PM Abhisit and FM Kasit are taking a "big risk" in having HDC and Tamthai (who is an academic, not an RTG official) resume the dialogue. The downsides include the following:

-- Tamthai believes he lacks a clear mandate for the discussions, and notes that no RTG official participated in the late-January Jakarta round.

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-- Because the process cuts out the security, military and intelligence agencies, the dialogue would lose all credibility should it fail to produce results quickly.

-- The renewed dialogue, should it be leaked, would be highly vulnerable to attack by the parliamentary opposition.

Politics, Personalities Add to Obstacles

¶ 15. (S) Another of Tamthai's concerns centers on domestic political uncertainties fueled by "red-vs.-yellow" discord as well as economic challenges (Ref C). He noted how difficult it would be to make progress on the southern issue in the current political environment. He commented that FM Kasit "could go," presumably a reference to the opposition's ardent attacks on him for openly supporting the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and its seizure of Bangkok's airports late last year.

¶ 16. (S) Tamthai also noted his concern about the lack of flexibility on the part of key military and security figures. The furthest they are willing to go is to grant amnesty to the insurgent leaders-in-exile, who in return would be expected to give up all their political demands. Tamthai expressed dismay that an adherent to this "unrealistic" view is Royal Thai Army

(RTA) Commander Anupong Paochinda, whom Tamthai has praised in the past as open-minded toward a political solution. Tamthai is also discouraged that the Abhisit government cannot seem to "get rid of" NSC Secretary General Surapol Puanaiyaka, who shut down the peace dialogue last year, and who Tamthai believes enjoys RTA protection.

¶7. (S) A final concern of Tamthai's is that the next round of the secret dialogue has not been scheduled. He attributed this to the complexity of trying to move the talks forward without official RTG concurrence.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
MORROW